

# DECUS INTERIORS







Ten years ago, after a short detour and first gaining experience with other designers and architects, Alexandra Donohoe Church started her own design office in Sydney, Australia. What started out as a one-woman business and discovery trip from behind her kitchen table is now a successful enterprise with ten employees. And Decus Interiors doesn't have to get any bigger for Alexandra, whose company philosophy is 'low volume, high quality'.

Whereas other interior designers and architects are known for and characterized by a specific style – minimalistic, eclectic, rural – this is not entirely the case for Decus Interiors. The Australian agency would much rather present itself on the basis of its specific approach and way of working, which time and time again results in something unique and preferably also somewhat unexpected. Authentic materials, details-oriented, great involvement and a certain tension and balance between exquisite and provocative, whimsical and classic and austere and colourful. With this combination, Alexandra Donohoe Church creates original interiors that – in her own words – “significantly and positively impact our everyday lives.”

The managing director of Decus Interiors grew up in the United States and travelled around the world before settling down in Sydney. While still at university, she started working as a receptionist at SJB Interiors + Architecture. Taking this ‘side door’, she managed to climb to the position of design assistant, after which she went on to gain even

Square Design, Alexandra Gordon, KilCare House © Anson Smart

more experience with Bates Smart, Paul Kelly and Luigi Rosselli. In 2009, it was time to start her own company, the best decision she had ever made, as Alexandra herself points out. She started with only one customer and worked at her kitchen table for two years. A decade later, Decus – which is derived from the Latin word for ‘glory’ or ‘splendour’ – is a respected business with ten full-time employees. With their expertise in interior design, decoration, architecture, project management and purchasing, they complete some 20 projects a year, although Alexandra would also gladly settle for less: “I’d rather do low volume, high quality work as you get to do more of each job properly.”



**CREATIVE TENSION**  
The design philosophy of Decus Interiors is founded on creating a certain ‘creative tension’ in the spaces. These should not be too matchy-matchy with a strictly coordinated – or rather: forced – colour palette. Not everything has to be on-trend and fit together like pieces of a puzzle, because then there is a good chance that you will repeat yourself. “We wholeheartedly love original design – we didn’t go into this business to copy and paste. It’s not how we work, it’s not who we are,” Alexandra explains. Notwithstanding the unconventional combinations of (authentic) materials, textures and colours, she and her team have a great feeling for how to create a well-thought-out and balanced whole.

bines different textures, shapes and volumes appeals to her enormously. “I tend to work with angles and proportions in a space as a means of catching the eye. I believe it has to do with balance. There is a boldness to my projects, but I strive to make it an understated boldness and at the same time to always add an unexpected element to destabilize the onlooker a little,” Yvanovitch told us in an interview last year (Imagicasa Winter 2018-2019) but it could just as well be a statement by Alexandra Donohoe Church. She, too, strives for a sense of balance in the interiors she designs and she believes that this balance can only be achieved by adding unusual and striking elements that challenge the whole.

## WITH A POSITIVE IMPACT ON OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

For example, a restrained colour palette will be challenged with rich, bold materials or statement lighting. One of Alexandra’s greatest inspirations – she even calls him a ‘design hero’ – is the French designer Pierre Yovanovitch. The unexpected way in which he too uses and com-

**ADVENTUROUSNESS**  
In addition to the personal philosophy of Decus Interiors regarding originality and not repeating oneself, working in close collaboration with the customer also contributes to the creation of unique interiors. These must reflect the individuality of the customer in each project. Alexandra explains their approach as follows: “We consult with our clients to tease out aspects of their personalities that we then imbue into the spaces they spend their time in.”



At least once a year Alexandra goes on an overseas buying trip looking for new inspiration. This means that the interior designer will travel to America or European cities such as Milan, Paris or Copenhagen in search of exclusive furniture, decorative items and artworks. Like that, Decus Interiors is able to supply their customers with something their neighbours won't have in their home. The result must, of course, match the customer's lifestyle, but a bit of adventurousness – and therefore originality – is never a bad thing.

**KILLCARE HOUSE**  
Killcare House is a project that sums up all these elements wonderfully well. This residence for a retired couple from Sydney is located in the beautiful Bouddi National Park and has a phenomenal view of both the beach and the park. Alexandra Donohoe



Church says the following about the client's requirements: "They wanted to create a sophisticated and unconventional beach house, whilst giving it a relaxed barefoot elegance." The construction of the house had already started when Alexandra and her team were contacted for decoration advice. They therefore had to take into account the vision of the architect Dan Cliff of Square Design, who meticulously worked out the volumes of the rooms and made sure plenty of light could enter the house thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows and open spaces. In the course of the project, Decus Interiors was given more and more assignments and the team was ultimately also responsible for or involved in the kitchen design, all the joinery, the finishing of the bathrooms and even the speakeasy wine cellar.

Just like Alexandra, the couple enjoyed being inspired by their travels abroad and the farm houses and chateaus they had discovered in Europe. The Decus Interiors team thus contrasted the large, open spaces with a rich palette of colours and interesting textures and by decorating some cosy corners which were to become the hidden gems in the house. The vintage pieces of furniture that the owners have collected over the years also give the whole an extra layer of personality.

For the colours, Alexandra was inspired by the Killcare House environment: white, blue, beige, brown, grey and green accents refer to nature, the trees, the beach... The choice of materials is also very varied with wood, black steel, leather, marble and even visible concrete and stone walls. It is certainly unconventional and yet the residents can absolutely unwind here on a location only one and a half hours driving from vibrant Sydney. The result is completely balanced-out and radiates an easy-going luxury that certainly has us charmed.

Killcare House inspires and challenges us. This is the kind of beach house we would love to see more often! 🌿



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